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he—he does not come back with you. But you must bring him back!"

"Yes, little girl."

When Little John had hung up the receiver, he sat in the booth for some moments, a big, strong hand pressed over his eyes. He could think so much better in the dark.

Had he been in the dark all the time? Had Love been blind?

He stood up, to his fullest height, in the little cabinet, his head almost touching its roof.

"I'm a fool!" he thought. "And a traitor, too! A man must trust blindly and believe until he knows—until he knows!" He passed the back of a big hand over his eyes roughly, as though brushing away a cobweb and the spider that had spun it; and when he stepped out, the 'phone operator noted that the strong mouth of his square-jawed, clean-shaven face wore a curiously grim little smile.

"Can you tell me, without breach of trust," he asked the girl, "who it was that called the pastor of my church up at Apple Hill from here? Was it a lady registered here—Mrs. Wall?"

"Yes, Mr. MacLean. Dressed in black and white. She's just gone upstairs from the dining room now."

John stood a moment in thought; then thanked the girl and strode briskly to the stairs. After all, he decided, as he ran up three steps at a time, while the operator's gaze followed his big, nimble figure with interest, he had no direct business with this Mrs. Wall. He had taken her measure in the jeweller's shop. She was no fool. And she would make a fool of him, he would make a fool of himself, and she would add an extra high finish, if he attempted to get anything out of her. He had nothing on her. If only he could remember! Her face—where was it he had seen her? He knitted his heavy dark brows in a vain endeavour to bring her back, as he strode along the corridor.

IF he were to keep his promise to Dorothy, his business now was with the young minister.

He drew the hotel key on its brass tag from his coat pocket and unlocked the door to his room at the wing corridor's end. As he picked up his sealskin cap from the bureau on which he had tossed it, he bent forward a moment toward the glass, and in the bright electric light, he noted how gray over the temples his hair was getting to be. He stood for some moments with bent head and narrowed lids, deep in thought; then suddenly threw up his chin with a grim little hardening of the lines of his mouth, slipped hurriedly into his coonskin coat, drew on his cap and switched off the light.

As he stepped out of the hotel, he met young Mr. Midge, hastening hungrily to a hurry-up dinner.

"Herb," said Little John, placing a big hand gently on the little fellow's narrow but immaculately clad shoulder, "remember that woman in black in the shop a while ago, when I was there?"

Mr. Midge started, and was conscious of a thrill. What was Little John MacLean after now, he wondered.

"Sure thing!" he said, after a moment's pretended remembering pause, which John took due note of. "I remember her."

"Ever seen her before?"

"No. Stranger to me."

"Yes? I thought perhaps she was an old friend of yours. You seemed to have lots to say."

"Got to be civil to a customer, John." Had Little John been talking to this "Mrs. Wall," Midge wondered. Had she asked John to drive her to Apple Hill, after all? Or had she told him—

"Yes, I suppose you do have to gossip a bit to a good customer," assented John. Mr. Midge started.

"I'm in a hurry, Mac," he said. "Got only half an hour off for a bite. The rush is fierce."

"Well, I'm in a hurry, too, Herb, and I won't detail you long." But Little John still stood between Mr. Midge and the entrance door. "I'm a pretty good customer, so you can gossip to me. What did she say about the pastor of my church at Apple Hill—Mr. Page?"

"Oh, said she knew him—quite an old friend of hers." Mr. Midge breathed a bit more freely.

"Anything else?"

"She asked if he lived in Farmington," lied Mr. Midge glibly, "and when I told her his parish was Apple Hill, she said she thought she would drive out there."

"I see. And she said she was an old friend, eh?"

"Sure thing! Quite an old friend!" Mr. Midge spoke breezily. He felt quite on Easy Street now. It was plain that John knew nothing of the counter gossip about himself and Dorothy Snow. "Yes, she spoke of him as Frank, and blew herself to a Christmas present for him—a little silver cross. Cost all of two dollars—though she seemed to be flush. Paid for it with a yellow boy—a tanner, you know; nice new one, too."

"That's all, Herb. Sorry to have kept you from your hard-earned dinner. Good-night and Merry Christmas!" Mr. Midge hastily entered the hotel much relieved in mind, but wondering mightily what Little John's catechism meant concerning the lady in black. Being naturally a gossip, Mr. Midge was curious in the narrow sense of the word. Before going in to dinner he looked over the register. Mrs. Wall had come to Farmington on the late afternoon or early evening train.

"Say, Ella," he said to the 'phone operator in a manner he considered irresistible, "did Mrs. Wall—a friend of mine stopping here—call up the new minister at Apple Hill?"

"Friend o' yours, eh?" sniffed the girl. She disliked Mr. Midge as much as she liked Little John. "Better ask her yourself, Herb. You just missed her in the dining room, but she's upstairs now, if you're looking for a marriage license."

Mr. Midge retired to the dining room, huffed,

(Continued on page 22)

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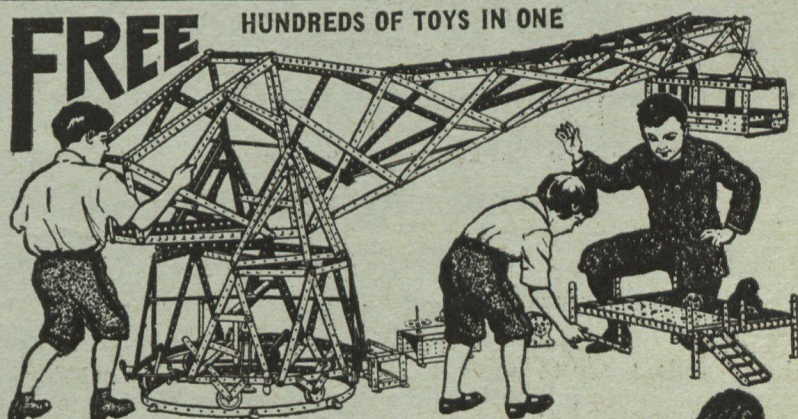


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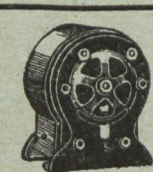
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